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Moral Orientation on Norms of Mutual Help and Responsibility in Middle Childhood

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Abstract

Peculiarities of the moral orientation in primary school in implementation of norms of mutual help and responsibility in solving the moral dilemmas are considered. The heterogeneity of moral reasoning and the relationship between the level of development of moral judgment and the child's readiness to follow moral norms in the behavior are revealed. It is proved that moral orientation on the principle of care is preceded by the orientation on the principle of justice.

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Keywords: moral orientation, moral dilemma, moral judgment, social situation of development, helping behavior, responsibility, moral reasoning.

1.Introduction

It is a well-known fact that the level of cognitive development determines child's moral judgments and peculiarities of moral choice in situation of moral dilemma solving. (Piage J, Kohlberg L., Eisenberg N.) [1], [2], [3]. Investigations done by of A.N.Leontiev, L.I.Bozhovich, S.N.Karpova, S.G. Yacobson shown that assimilation of social norms and standards of moral behavior occurs in active child's action and his communication with adults and peers, where these samples becomes the regulators and motives of behavior [4], [5], [6], [7]. Social situation of development specific for every age (Vygotsky L.S., Elkonin D.B., Karabanova O.A.) defines different children sensitivity to content of moral norms and as the result different dynamic of

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assimilation of moral norms with different content [8], [9]. We supposed that it will be reflected in differences in orientation on realization of moral norms of mutual aid and responsibility in middle childhood, concretely in heterogeneity of moral judgments about each of the moral norms. Helping behavior, cooperation and interaction in process of problem solving that can't be solved independently by the partner, seeking for help, corresponds to the child's relations with peers in middle childhood [10]. The acceptance of responsibility for results of your activity is the goal of development at that age.

2. The present study

Empirical investigation of peculiarities of moral orientation on norms of mutual aid and responsibility for the results of your own behavior is aimed on definition of moral orientation of children in middle childhood.

Aims:

- To define differences of orientation on realization of moral norms of mutual aid and responsibility/honesty in middle childhood.
- To investigate the peculiarities of moral judgments proving realization/violation of moral norms of mutual and responsibility.

3. Method

4.1 Participants

1295 schoolchildren aged from 9 till 10 took part in the investigation, attending the 4-th grade, living in Moscow, Vologda, Novosibirsk, Omsk, Tambov, Habarovsk, Kaluga regions.

4.2 Measures

We developed the technique of moral dilemmas aimed on realization of moral norms of mutual help and responsibility/honesty and readiness to take responsibility for results of your action. Subjects were given the moral dilemma in two forms. The first form presented the hero – subject's peer - that broke the moral norm in the situation of moral choice, the second form showed the hero –subject's peer – that realized the moral norm. Different variants of moral choice basis were given. All of them correspond to different stages of moral consciousness in L.Kohlbergs theory – preconventional, conventional and postconventional. The subject was to choose interpretation that was most adequate to hero's choice according to his opinion. In conclusion subject was to answer the question how he himself will behave in situation of moral choice.

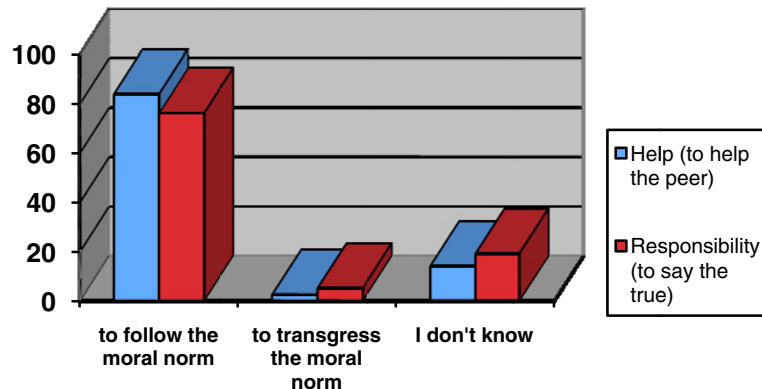
Parameters of esteem of moral dilemma solving by subjects:

- Readiness to realize the moral norm in verbal behavior.
- Level of moral judgments/interpretation development in situation of realizing/breaking the moral norms.

5. Results

We analyze the subject's readiness to realize norms of mutual help and responsibility.

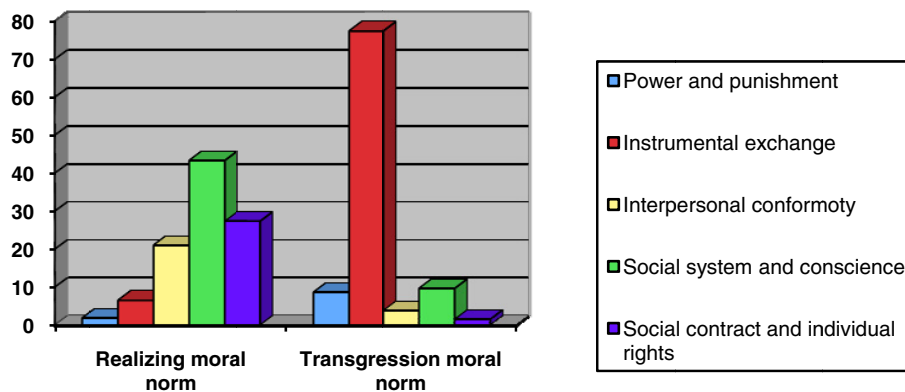
Picture 1. Readiness to realize norms of mutual help and responsibility/honesty.



The picture #1 shows that majority of subjects are ready to realize moral norm as desire to help peer, tell the truth and be responsible for action. This is the evidence that children know moral norms and are aware of social desirability to realize them. At the same time there is a group of subjects that expresses doubts in their readiness to make choice even in the case of verbal, not real behavior.

The results of analyses of arguments to correspond with moral norms or to break it in dilemma #1 “Help classmates” is presented in picture #2.

Picture 2. The level of moral judgments in moral dilemma “Helping behavior” (according to L.Kohlberg model).

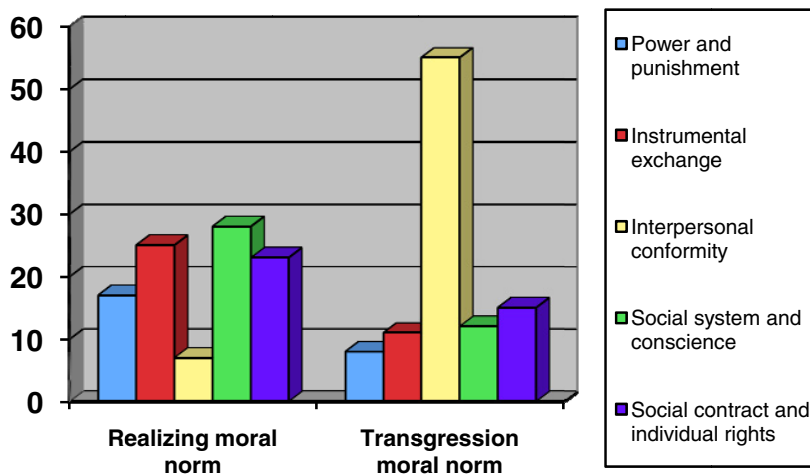


The analyses of moral judgment’s level let to define significant differences in level of moral judgments in two cases – when the norm is maintained and when it is broken. When the moral norm is respected then moral judgments corresponds to more high levels – conventional and postconventional. When the moral norm is

broken the children's moral judgments correspond to preconventional level – mostly own interests and instrumental exchange. It's worth to be mentioned that refusal to help peer children justify by own interests and necessity to realize own obligations. Thus in case of choice between own interests and help peer subjects orientates mostly on priority of own interests. Justification of help peers is connected with the necessity to fulfill the actual duties to keep the institutions going as the whole, to accept the societal point of view of the system that defines roles and rules.

The other distribution of moral judgments for justification of necessity to realize/break moral norm of responsibility was shown (to tell the truth and be responsible for consequences of your action) .See picture #3.

Pic. 3. The level of moral judgments in moral dilemma “Responsibility” (according to L.Kohlberg model).



You can see that in the case of moral choice in the situation of taking responsibility justification following the moral norm almost equally justified as moral judgments as preconventional and conventional levels. On the preconventional level the judgments of the stage “Individualism, instrumental exchange” are dominated. It clears subjects that follow norms and rules only when acting meets one's own interests and needs. On a conventional level - acceptance of the responsibility they argue as the imperative of conscience to meet one's obligations defined because laws are to be upheld. The moral transgression is providing by the necessity to keep mutual relationships, respect, loyalty. It is so important “being good” that children refuse to accept the responsibility for their behavior because they believe that this can lead to conviction and negative assessments of other people. The rejection of the moral norm is associated with anxiety and fear of the social assessment and the loss of their «good name».

Comparative analysis of moral judgments in case of following the norm in dilemmas “Mutual help” and “Responsibility” shows significant differences in moral judgments distribution. Moral dilemma “Mutual help” seems to be more understandable for children and decisions are proved by judgments of conventional level more often than for moral dilemma “Responsibility” where subjects uses judgments of preconventional level more often. Thus we can assume that children shows higher level of moral reasoning in dilemma of helping behavior. Vice versa,

choice to break the moral norm leads to different justifications in moral judgments in different dilemmas: lower level of moral judgments: instrumental morality, authority power and punishment in dilemma “Mutual help”, and desire to save good interpersonal relations, acceptance and recognition in social group in dilemma “Responsibility”. Acceptance of responsibility for own behavior and it's consequences goes into contradiction

with child's desire to be "good boy/girl" that leads to refusal to follow moral norm "to be responsible for own actions and tell the truth".

6. Discussion

Most children of middle childhood age showed the readiness to realize moral norms of mutual aid and responsibility in the behavior. At the same time about 20-24% of subjects felt doubts in moral choice for norms even on verbal level. That reflects, firstly, the age dynamic of moral development and secondly, the problem of moral education – the assimilation of moral norms in middle childhood from the other side. The level of moral judgments development corresponds to level of interpersonal conformity for most of the children (3 stage of conventional level of moral consciousness according to L.Kohlberg's theory). Most children showed preconventional level of moral judgments (25% and 20% correspondingly in moral dilemmas "Help" and "Responsibility"). Motives to realize moral norm for children according to their significance are

- desire to deserve recognition and be accepted by peers;
- aspiration for positive self-esteem ("be good");
- aspiration to avoid punishment;
- acceptance of moral norm as standard of relations in society.

The comparison of levels of moral judgments as justifications of necessity to realize or possibility to break moral norm is the evidence of famous phenomenon of heterogeneity of moral consciousness. Break of moral norms corresponds to lower levels of moral judgments.

A comparative analysis of moral reasoning in moral dilemmas with different moral-normative content allows defining important differences in decision-making process and moral judgment content. Orientation on norm of responsibility combines with lack of readiness to accept negative social esteem of your behavior and other possible consequences in middle childhood. Heterogeneity, which was revealed in different level of moral judgments for different moral norms, gives the basis to regard moral development as complicated nonlinear process, determined by social situation of child's development that defines different sensitivity to moral norms violation. Results proved the proposed idea about age psychological peculiarities of moral development that expresses in different time assimilation of moral norms with different content.

Address to two types of moral orientation – orientation on care (norm of mutual help) and orientation on justice (norm of responsibility) (L.Kohlberg, N.Gilligan others, Molchanov S.V.) allows to make the conclusion that formation of stable personality orientation on care principle preceded formation of orientation on justice principle in ontogenetic development [11], [12], [13], [14]. That can be explained in the following way: child's moral development directed on acceptance and realization of ethic norms that regulates social and interpersonal relations, relations of personality and society bases on emotional interaction and communication between child and mother where care becomes the foundation of life relations and a principle of construction of child's social situation of development.

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